

From H. L.
May 16/04

HIGHER CRITICISM

And
Early Training.

The Last Address of the
Late Dr. Parker of the ..
City Temple, London, Eng.

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Dr. Parker's Last Message.

We feel bound to publish in full the Presidential Address prepared by Dr. Parker for the Brighton meetings of the National Free Church Council, and read on Tuesday by Principal Vaughan Pryce. The thoughts contained in it were very much in Dr. Parker's mind during the last months of his life, and were continually the theme of his conversation. The problems presented by the Higher Criticism troubled him. Although he had found for himself a way of solution, and was not retarded in his own preaching, he deeply felt that the churches had to pass through a time of stress before a readjustment could be reached, and earnestly deprecated any rash and hasty treatment of the subject from the pulpit. The action of the Church of England in connection with the Education Act was also a great weight upon his spirit. For himself he longed for a better understanding between the Church of England and Nonconformity. He did all in his power to promote it. Any expression of friendly feeling from Anglican dignitaries moved him much. Almost the only letters he kept were letters with messages of this kind. But more and more he became convinced that in the present temper of the Church of England nothing was to be expected except continual aggression, and that the one course for Nonconformists was to vindicate their position by all possible means—by ordinary means where they could be used, and by extraordinary means where conscience was invaded. He would say over and over again that the Church of England in its corporate capacity had never made a concession to the rights of Nonconformists that was not forced on them.—The "British Weekly."

Higher Criticism and Early Training.

In all controversy how much depends on stand-points ! How much standpoints are affected by training ! We talk fluently about independence and private judgment, and the rights of conscience ; all that is well ; in the sense, if any, in which we use the words there is no harm in them, but are they not words that need qualification— words that are surrounded by an atmosphere—words that are of necessity limited and partial ? The most conflicting conceptions of things may be right from a merely individual point of view and utterly wrong from a point of view that takes in more field and light and air, more of time and space, more of history and experience. It takes all men to make man, all knowledge to make truth, all sacrifice to make love. Only He who knows the whole " world " can ever imagine that it was worth dying for ; only He who knows " all nations " can create a gospel big enough for them ; only He who rests in the bosom of the Father can wait until He has put all enemies under His feet. We are but fractions—splinters, not rocks—men, not man. Let us be careful how we come to big conclusions—lest we overweight ourselves, and become popes whilst in the very act of claiming to be Protestants. At the best we see through a glass darkly. Each sees his own glint of truth ; no one star is the universe ; no one candle is the sun. To know this is to learn how to be charitable, and

patient, and hopeful. There is no pope so hateful as the Protestant who acts as if he thought himself infallible.

Our Free Church training gives us our standpoint. We have been made by others. We carry our cradle with us. We are the product of our native air. Perhaps we are little more than the sum of our antecedents; perhaps our independence when analysed will turn out to be the last expression of our environment. We might have been different men if we had been born in India,—the same, yet not the same,—the fire might have penetrated further into our blood and the heat of our imagination might have required corresponding gorgeousness of language. "Judge not, that ye be not judged." If we had been born in Fiji we might have taken a different view of Church and State, and even of time and space, those strange quantities which are at once limited and immeasurable,—at once as approachable and as unapproachable as God.

Our own training—our own bringing up—as Free Churchmen is responsible for much. Any other ecclesiastical language is a kind of foreign tongue, with which we have but a dictionary acquaintance, but it is really no part of our breath, our blood, our soul. Many men know just enough of a language to make blunders in it; this is true not only of grammatical language, but of ecclesiastical language, experience, and spiritual fellowship. Our bringing-up as Dissenters was a rough and hard training. It has, of course, left its deep mark upon us. We were not reared in kings' houses. We are most powerful when we are most ourselves. All aping is weakness.

When I think of all our Dissenting training I sometimes break down; my tears are hot and bitter. Let us dwell upon some aspects of this training for a time. We were brought up amongst simple, unsuspecting believers. They told us that the Bible was all true. They called it "The Holy Bible," and they held it to be such. They told us that Eden was a real place, with real trees, and a real serpent. They told us that a four-branched river rolled through the sunny paradise; we thought that Adam bathed in Hiddekel; and that the gold that colored the Pison stream was solid, and yellow, and marketable. We never doubted it. The place on the map was pointed out, with the assurance that if Eden was not there it was thereabouts. Some people believe this still. The Salvation Army believes it. Some primitive Primitive Methodists believe it,—Spurgeon believed it. In its highest, deepest, grandest meaning I myself believe it.

Our mothers are responsible for a good deal. They were not literal grammarians, but they were gigantic believers. They used to read to us the story of Joseph and cry over it, and made much of the coat of many colors, and when we came to "your father, the old man of whom ye spake, is he well?" our brawny fathers sobbed and pretended to be only coughing. If anybody had then told us what some people tell us now, that there was no Joseph—no old man—no coat of many colors—no life in Egypt—no forgiving brethren—no family reconciliation; that it is all a dream, a fantasy, an illusion in color; I know not in what terms he would have been denounced and with what horror he would have been

shunned. Some of us still believe in the history of Joseph; and when all other "short stories" have run out, this story of Joseph will exact its tribute of tears from the eyes of far-off generations.

Then in this matter of credulity our quaint old pastors were little better than our mothers. If some modern criticism is true, those old pastors were unconscious impostors. They had not a "doubt" to bless themselves with. They read the Bible and actually believed it, and preached it without a stammer. They used to preach about Daniel and the lions' den, and make us feel heroic in the heroism of the brave young man. Now it turns out that there were no lions, there was no den, and worst of all, there was no Daniel. The Book of Daniel is taken away bodily. Yet we are told that the Bible has been given back to us by critics, and that it is a better book than we had before. Some of us cannot yet receive this same saying. At present we are suffering from a grievous sense of loss. Do not suppose, however, that all the higher critics are of one mind, or that they all pursue one method, and do not suppose that every minister has given up Joseph and his brethren, or even Daniel and the lions' den. Broad and indiscriminate statements are apt to be untrue and unjust on all sides of great controversies.

Our dear old pastors used to preach about David and quotingly call him "the sweet singer of Israel," and now according to some it turns out that David was no singer at all, and that he probably never heard of the Psalms which he is supposed to have written. Still more widespread is the havoc made by some ruthless sickles. It is bad enough to lose Joseph

and his brethren, Daniel and his den, David and his harp, Jonah and his whale, but these are conservative trifles. There was, according to some, no miraculous conception, no ministry of miracles, no resurrection of Christ. All is idealism, poetry, dream, and hazy myth. Bethlehem and Nazareth disappear from what we used to call the sacred page. In the old, old time when we were very young, the Christian Church had a heaven and a hell, an immortal soul, a direct revelation from heaven, a book which it called "the Word of God." In those early days we thought ascended ones were "for ever with the Lord." We said, in a sob which was really a song, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." We said that each of them had a crown, a harp, and a white robe. Now we are told that all we supposed to be real was but fancy, mirage, and "the stuff that dreams are made of."

I want you to see that if we yielded to these suggestions and demands we should be giving up a good deal. Do not suppose that it is easy for the soul to part with its very self—with all the things which would leave only emptiness and mocking echoes behind. We were sad when we saw the Bible thus depleted. We had really loved the Bible. It was literally everything to us. So when it seemed to go from us piece by piece, our hearts were grieved and our prospect was a great all-covering cloud. When we were asked why we were so sad, we could not

easily refrain from saying—each for himself—“Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire?” We had so much—so very much to give up. Some of us have not even yet given up our faith. Blessed be God, some of us still believe in the whole Bible. We know that translation may have its faults, and that copyists may make blunders, and yet we hold to the whole book—we still call it The Holy Bible—it is to us in substance and in effect the veritable Word of God. All so-called higher criticism is not, however, of the same quality. There are higher critics and higher critics. Some of them are as lovingly Biblical as the best of us, and we thank them for all their noble and most useful service.

Yes, we have been asked to give up a good deal, and what, as I have already said, aggravates us most of all is that we have been asked to believe that the giving of it up has made the Bible more precious than ever to us. Genesis turns out to be mainly fable; Abram is not a man, but “an eponymous hero”; Joseph “is not” in another and deeper sense; Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, are mere dreams and nightmares; the books of Kings and Chronicles are removed bodily; Ecclesiastes and Solomon’s Song ought never to have been in the Bible; yet, notwithstanding all this we are to think of the Bible being “given back” to us more precious than ever. We cannot do so all at once. Our training blocks the way. Early impressions are often indelible. It is hard to regard supposed enemies as all at once our disguised friends. For example, many

of us were brought up to believe that Tom Paine was an awful character—nothing short, indeed, of an infidel, blatant, presumptuous, defiant. Tom Paine was a kind of moral typhus, or a malignant form of smallpox. Every man who had a copy of "The Age of Reason," kept it in a secret drawer and lent it at night-time and under a whispered vow of secrecy. To possess "The Age of Reason" was equal to having an infectious and loathsome disease. Bishop Watson answered "The Age of Reason," but the Bishop is now nowhere. Tom Paine's "soul goes marching on," but the Bishop is forgotten as if his book were a mere escape of gas. Tom Paine showed wonderful insight, and in a manner anticipated all the higher critics.

For example, Tom Paine said, "Whoever wrote the Pentateuch, Moses had little or nothing to do with it." But some who say this very thing have orthodox chairs in English universities and sign even more articles than thirty-nine, whilst Tom Paine is branded as an infidel, and has no professional income. Tom Paine said there were at least two Isaiahs, in other words, that the Isaiah who wrote the first part of the book never wrote the second part, and perhaps never knew that a second part was written. Some higher critics say the very same thing to-day, whilst Tom Paine is still regarded by orthodoxy as a most noxious beast. Poor Bishop Watson is on many sides treated as an evangelical milksop, whilst Tom Paine is lauded as a man of progress and of advanced and modern thought. Still we are told that Tom and his successors have given us "back" the Bible, and that it is now more precious

than ever. It is not for me to revile Tom Paine; but I take it upon myself to say that no Tom Paine, notwithstanding all his insight and foresight, ought to be in any Free Church pulpit, and if Tom Paine is there we ought to eject and denounce him as a man who is making a living under false pretences.

It is not to be wondered at that some of us still cling to the Bible after the illiterate and traditional manner of our fathers and mothers, and pastors. Blame our training. Take full account of our antecedents. We drew in our love of the Bible with our mother's milk. The Bible helped some of us when the father died, and when there was no coal in the grate nor bread in the cupboard, it sanctified our poverty, our struggles, our desolation. It turned the grave into a garden-plot. It put heart into us when all other things failed. The Bible had made us men. We are not to be told that this consolatory (not critical) Bible is still left to us. How long will it be left? Still higher critics may possibly arise in distant years who will purloin this jewel also. Who can say how much of the Bible will be left in half a century? We have a right to be suspicious. Where much has gone more may go. On the whole, therefore, I am of opinion that it is better to hold the Bible very much as we have always held it, to keep an open mind in relation to all competent and reverent criticism, to cling to the Bible in all its proved consolations and particular results, and to leave many difficulties and perplexities to be settled when in heaven we have more time and more light.

There is one test to which I cannot but submit every creed, every religion, every book. What kind

of manhood has it produced ? What sort of men did the old Bible grow ? What of their aspirations, their service, their sacrifice ? They were grand men. Perhaps narrow-minded, perhaps austere, perhaps conservative, but they were honorable, determined, self-sacrificing men. They were men who put themselves to a great deal of trouble for others. They gave away much money. They counted not their lives dear unto them. They liberated slaves, they smashed iniquitous monopolies, they founded missionary societies, they dared fire and sword, pestilence and cruelty. They had not the latest learning on the Pentateuch, Isaiah, and the Apocryphal books, but they gripped the Bible with a nerve of steel. They had immense and miracle-working faith. I believe in my heart that they were more self-sacrificing than many who laugh at their ignorance and condemn their narrowness. They believed in the literal inspiration of the Bible, in the immortality of the soul, in eternal punishment, in the atoning death of the Lord Jesus, and they cried after, if finally they might attain, the holiness of God. They were no critics, they were great workers, not grammarians but generous givers, not pedants but unsparing in benevolence and sacrifice. I judge every religion by the men it makes, and so judged, the Bible has no need to be ashamed of its stalwarts and its heroes. Shall I offend scholars and critics, grammarians and pedants, if I frankly say that merely as such they have next to nothing to do with the Bible ? That the Bible has little or nothing to say to them in their academical capacity ? The Bible seeks and finds the heart, talks to the spirit when in the deep-

est humility, goes out after the soul in its penitence and mortal hunger. When the reader is least a grammarian he may be nearest the spirit of the book. "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, To this man will I look, to the man that is of a humble and contrite heart, and that trembleth at My word." To "tremble" is better than to parse; in a deep and large sense salvation is not of grammar, else then only grammarians could have a high place in heaven. The plain duty of scholars, however, is to know the facts of the Bible as they really are, and to follow them with honest resolution. We must distinguish between fact and fable; we must buy the truth and sell it not; we must, if needs be, crown Tom Paine and depose Bishop Watson; at all costs and risks we must know the facts, and if needs be turn our back upon the most venerated superstitions. But we must be sure that alleged facts are real facts, and we must every day live in the large and charitable temper of inquiry and sympathy and truthfulness. We must love the sunshine, and the fresh air, and the growing day. Working in this spirit, God will keep back from us nothing that is good for the soul. I hope we are all willing to put aside the Bible as a book outworn on condition that a better book, more fully authenticated, more evidently from God, be first put in its place. We hold the old Bible we know until a better one has come.

In further considering this subject of training we must at once make a broad distinction between old men and young men. We have not had the same training for our work. We belong to different generations and must be judged accordingly. Of my young

brethren, I may say, as many seniors can say, "They must increase, but I must decrease." All that I ask from men who have enjoyed the highest university advantages is gratitude to the men who placed such advantages within their reach. We were not, as Nonconformists, fifty years ago, permitted to enter the universities, but we were determined that our sons should enter them. From those sons I expect gratitude. Do not mock the old men who have won your liberties. We may not be so learned as you are, but we made learning of the highest kind possible to you. If we do not bear the Oxford brand or the Cambridge brand, you know why; and you will neither mock us nor permit us to be mocked. You young men owe all you have to old and resolute Nonconformity, and you are not the men—the contemptible and soon-to-be-forgotten creatures—to remind us of our lack of technical culture. God has been graciously pleased to own ministers that the universities have either laughed at or ignored, and has given them sheaves in the day of harvest. We have worked to the best of our ability, and God has judged our desire to please Him. We should not, however, like the ungrateful contempt of some of our own children. Spare us. We cannot be long here now. The next generation will do better. Erudition loses nothing by modesty. Let God choose His own ministers. Always leave Him room in His own Church. For myself I do not propose to follow any learning which would create, perhaps, with a degree of ostentation, a gulf between the pulpit and the pew. Learning should not divide, but unite. It is poor learning that makes men cynics and sneerers.

I pray God for "the tongue of the learned, that knows how to be a word in season to him that is weary." That is the great learning! That is the learning of experience, of bitter sorrow, of sharp pain, of lonely Gethsemane. I pray God to continue to send into the ministry of the Free Churches men who will provoke the question: "How knoweth this man these things, seeing he hath never learned letters?" Letters, if they stand alone, are the poorest and meanest of all learning. We must not disparage letters; we speak of them in this connection when they are letters only, grammars only, lexicons only. When they are saturated with the spirit of prayer, they are an acceptable sacrifice, and a sweet smelling savor to God. We must pray for the inspiration of the Almighty. "The gold and crystal cannot equal it, the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold; no mention shall be made of coral or of pearls; the topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it," and as for rubies, they are in comparison as ashes thrown out as worthless.

There is only one thing that I dread more than self-important learning, and that is self-important ignorance. I dread the minister to whom preaching is easy. I hate, with religious and even holy hatred, the sermons that are shaken out of the coat-sleeve on a Saturday night. We do not want such men in the ministry of the gospel. Preaching should be a shedding of blood. Preaching is not a trick in plans, in cunning outlines, in shapely sculpture. There is a cant phrase now in vogue which I dislike. We say of such and such a man, "He is the greatest sermon-builder in the modern pulpit." Preaching is

not sermon-building, it is sermon-growing; it is the cloquence of a redeemed and grateful soul; it is the glow and the radiance of a wise exposition confirmed by a holy and satisfying experience. Never regard the gospel as "simple" in the sense of being shallow; rather be overcome and prostrated as by "a light above the brightness of the sun," a baptism of glory at the Damascus gate of the pulpit. Never preach in haste. Study much, not to make the sermon obscure, but to make it as clear as crystal, and when you have done your very best always remember that you have not yet penetrated to "the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High," and that far beyond all star-routes and orbits immeasurable, and all shadows "dark with excess of light," there is a mystic path infinitely brighter than the milky way, which the vulture's eye of the sublimest power and genius hath not seen. I say again, therefore, that we do not want the help of men who boast of their ignorance and offer their crude vulgarities as a sacrifice unto the Lord.



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